

# CUT-THRU REVIEW

2014

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The Big Sandy Community & Technical College  
Literary Magazine

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# CUT-THRU REVIEW 2014

We gratefully acknowledge the support of the people at Big Sandy Community & Technical College, including President George D. Edwards, Provost Nancy Johnson, and Director of College Relations Joshua Ball.

“Eastern Kentuckians literally move mountains. The magazine is named for the spirit exemplified by the Pikeville Cut-Thru. Completed in 1987, the Pikeville Cut-Thru is one of the country’s largest engineering and earth-moving achievements. The inspiration of Pikeville mayor William Carter Hambley, construction took fourteen years, involved blasting twenty-three million cubic yards of rock, moving five million cubic yards of dirt, included nearly twenty state and federal agencies, and carried a price tag of sixty million dollars. The result is a channel – 1,300 feet wide, 3,700 feet long, and 523 feet deep – into which the railroad tracks were relocated and the Big Sandy River diverted. Corridors of U.S. Highways 23, 119, 460 and Kentucky 80 were combined into a four-lane road. The Cut-Thru created or opened up 390 acres of usable land, nearly doubling the amount of flat land adjacent to the town, all of which is now free from the threat of flooding (Pike County Chamber of Commerce). The Pikeville Cut-Thru, and similar projects, change the way residents live. The necessary cost of progress, however, is measured in more ways than in dollars. Many homes, my grandparents’ included, were torn down or moved. A way of life comes to an end. Still, the creative, no-nonsense spirit of the people of Eastern Kentucky continues.” – Tim Skeen

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Jamie Curry

### **A Role to Hell and Back**

It was 9:15 p.m. on a Wednesday night, September 1993. I was gathering some clothes and few items to take to the hospital with me, but the one thing I needed the most I could not find, my mother's diamond wedding ring. I could not leave without it. My heart was beating a mile a minute. I started throwing stuff all over the place and ripping things off the shelves. The more I looked, the more I panicked. My mother was in the hospital having complications from a surgery she had just had the previous day, and her only request was that I hurry and bring her wedding ring with me. I had to find that damn ring!

I vaguely heard the telephone ring; since we lived in the basement and our landlady lived upstairs, hers was the only phone we had. Evelyn, our landlady, came to the stairs and said my aunt was on the phone and wanted to talk to my dad, but he was busy looking for my mother's rings. I went upstairs to take the call, and when I answered my aunt was very upset and refused to talk to me. I put down the phone and went to yell for my dad, and suddenly I stopped. A chill raced down my spine, but I shook it off. I didn't want to know why. I raced to get my things and get to the car, so I could turn it on and be ready to go, but after a minute nobody came out. I didn't want to think; I just wanted to get to my mom as fast as I could. After a few more minutes, I got out of the car, but I didn't want to go in the house so I laid my head on the hood of the car; it felt warm against my face and the sound of the engine eased my beating heart. I could no longer wait, and as I walked to the front door of the house, my footsteps got heavier and heavier. Standing in Evelyn's living room, I looked at my dad and I felt a lone tear fell down my face. My dad said the words I never wanted him to say, "Your mother is dead."

During the whole process after he said those words, it was like I was walking in a funnel; it was calm and quiet inside, but everything around me was chaos. From that point on I felt like an outsider, telling my brother, sister, and the rest of the family, trying to comfort them when I needed

the comfort myself, but for some reason I felt like it wasn't my turn yet. When we all arrived at the hospital, and I walked into my mother's room, she was lying there as white as the sheet that covered her, and she had all these tubes sticking in her arms and down her throat. I heard myself say, "Take it out," but the nurse said she couldn't do that because after a sudden unexplained death, the law says that everything should remain intact at the time of death for the medical examiner. I heard someone screaming as I pulled the covers over Mom's shoulder. She was so cold, and I tried to rub her shoulders to get her warm again, but it didn't matter how hard I rubbed, she just stayed cold. I looked around the room with its harsh lighting, and all the machines that seemed to take up every space that wasn't occupied by a human body. I didn't seem to recognize anyone; all I saw were people yelling and pointing at me, but I didn't know why, and all of a sudden I felt like someone had hit me; I doubled over and realized that the screaming I heard earlier was me screaming and the people yelling and screaming were coming toward me, and the last thing I remember was blackness, and I welcomed it.

As you can tell from my story so far, that on that night something in my world shifted, kind of like how the world did after 9/11. Tragedy happens to all of us, but the world doesn't stop or slow down but just keeps sweeping us along its tide forcing us to move forward. Next came, as it always does, the robotic motions of planning the funeral, picking out flowers, sifting through old photos, wondering if great Aunt Ella is going to make it down and with whom she should stay. All these hundreds of little things that are always the same, just different people. As all the people shifted along at the funeral, each one saying the same thing over and over – "I'm so sorry for your loss" – I just wanted to smack them and say "shut up," but I couldn't do that because that was the role I had to play: I had to be the dutiful older daughter, the one who was supposed to make everything better for everyone else.

After the funeral when I thought I could finally let myself mourn and grieve the way I wanted, my aunts came and picked me up and took me to a lawyer's office; they talked about how that doctor killed my mother, and that it was my job again to be the executive of my mom's estate and to file a lawsuit against the doctor. For the next five years I dealt with lawyers, specialists, depositions, pictures, and autopsy reports. For five years

Jamie Curry

the night of my mother's death has been played in my head time and time again. My world was ripped apart and left me bleeding, and it has never closed. If dealing with the lawyers was not bad enough, I had my family to deal with also. My siblings would argue that my mom's family didn't have any rights when it came to my mother because of the entire rift my mom had with her family. My family is the type that if you wanted to have a relationship with them, then you had to make the effort to do so and if you didn't then you were an outsider. I made the effort, but my siblings did not. And then you had my family who said they knew what was best for us kids and that they would take care of it. If they wanted to take care of it, then why did they want me to do it?

For five years, again just like the funeral, I tried to be the good daughter and make everything alright and to make everyone happy. Could I do it? No. On the last day before we were to go to court, my lawyers brought me in and told me that if we did go through with the lawsuit that we could lose. The case was to be heard in a county that is strictly conservative, which means that the jurors would most likely be doctors and lawyers and business men, basically, upper-class. To go after a doctor's license is very hard because of all the malpractice insurance they have, and most people settle out of court. This is what my family wanted me to do, go after his license. My siblings just wanted to hurt the doctor anyway they could, and that meant money. I was so tired; I just slumped down in the chair and looked around me at a table that was big enough to fit 20 people and at the dark wooden walls and expensive artwork hanging everywhere. I thought of all the time I had spent doing this for everyone else and to come right down to it and be told all of it was a waste, just because the wrong class of people would be my judge. My wound started to bleed even more. Suddenly it was if I could hear my mother's voice. She said that she was proud of me, and I did all that I could for the ones I loved, but it was time to stop.

In the end not everyone was happy, and I was told by some that my mom would be disappointed in me, but I know in my heart she wasn't because she told me so. I stopped making everyone happy, and I separated myself from everyone for a while so I could deal with the loss of my mom and to stop bleeding . . . finally.



PAMELA SMITH

*Untitled*

Mary Fitzpatrick

**Old Greasy John**

We were up early to get Mom to her dialysis appointment. We had been doing this for several years now, every Monday, Wednesday, and Saturday from six a.m. until noon. It was a beautiful sun-filled day. The air was full of the scent of honeysuckle and fresh-mown grass. The only dark spot on the day was across the road, on the bank. A big Jones and Preston canopy over an open hole with green mats and chairs all around. It would later be filled in and covered with bunches of flowers. Old John would not have liked that; he never cared much for flowers.

This was the gloomiest and most perfect day. After dialysis, we sat with all the family members and listened to the preacher talk of Heaven and Hell and where we would spend eternity. At this time our grief was so pure and disabling, we really did not care. There were so many of his friends, coal truck drivers and tippie workers, and even some of his ex-bosses who had showed up. They told each other stories about Greasy coming out in rain or snow or whatever either to fix their truck or to make sure they got home alright. He was always there. Many of these people owed him a lot and could never repay him, but that was not why he did it.

Greasy was a mechanic extraordinaire. If you had something that was broke, you called Greasy. If your car wouldn't go or you needed work done on your truck, water heater, lawn mower, weed eater, stove, refrigerator, air conditioner, or anything with a motor, he could and would fix it for you. He never overcharged for his work because most times he didn't charge at all. That was the kind of man he was. He even fixed wheelchairs on occasion. If he ran across a problem he couldn't figure out, he'd drink a few beers and go to bed on it. The next day he would have the answer and have it fixed in no time. Mechanics came to him naturally; he was just that good. You could always find him outside working on this or that. He really left an empty spot in the yard.

That was Johnny Fitch, also known by his friends as Greasy John. A family man who was very protective, and you never said a negative word

about his wife or children. He protected them from everything. When my brother, who was in the service, had a car wreck, Greasy drove all the way to Massachusetts to bring him home and take care of him until he was well. He came to me and helped me move to protect me and my kids from my husband and his family. When it came to his kids, he was afraid of nothing nor nobody.

Now the procession was going up Starfire Hill; the cars just kept coming. The first was the black hearse with the most precious flag-draped cargo followed by Mom's blue Cadillac and all the families' cars, some old, some new, some shiny, and some falling apart, but all there for the same reason, to follow Johnny home.

There was not enough parking space, so the road at Greasy's home was partially blocked by the visitors. No one ever complained. Mom could not get up to the canopy to sit, so we put her in the porch swing, with John's Chihuahua, Mickey, so they could see what was happening. Mom with her oxygen was unable to shed tears, but she sobbed uncontrollably. The smell of the flowers overpowered the breeze that had started to move into the area.

I had to leave Mom and go up the embankment. I didn't want to go, but I had to. We sang "Amazing Grace," and they sent Greasy off with a 21-gun salute. They placed his very special American flag in my hands, and I gasped for breath.

I remember the half smile, the cigarettes and lighter in the right pocket and the tire gauge in the left, where I put them. He was taken from us way too soon. As the oldest daughter, I had to be strong and continue to care for my Mother. I was and always will be Daddy's little girl. That day, Mom was grieving inside and trying to be strong, but all she said was that she wanted to be with her Johnny. We were all missing him already. He was our solid base, the strong oak tree, the guiding force and protector, and now he was gone.

He was just plain old Greasy John or Johnny Fitch, the fix-it man. He was my dad and my hero. We watched as he was laid to rest with all the pomp and circumstance of any member of royalty that you could imagine and with many people to say their final farewells to him. This definitely was his day, and I slowly walked down the bank and placed his flag into Mom's waiting hands, wrinkled and trembling, the hands of his one true love, and she held it close to her chest and sobbed. This was all she had left of her beloved Greasy John.

Brandon Goble

### A Light in a Dark Place

In my life, I was brought up to have manners, be respectful, and always be mindful to others – I was brought to be a model citizen. It was to my understanding that everyone’s mothers and fathers were doing the same things as my mom; I found out this was not the case. I am seventeen years old and I remember a time when I was reminded of the kindness of others: a time when, even in the darkest of places, there was a glimmer of light for me to see the way. I believe that there is kindness in the world; I know that this place isn’t so bad.

It was January 18th, 2009, and I was in Washington D.C. I remember the date because it was just two days before the Presidential Inauguration. I was with my National Young Scholars group, taking a tour around the memorials. We were selected on account of intelligence, dedication towards the education system, and willingness to better our community.

Here we were in the capital of our great nation – the place where the President lived, the place where everything big was decided, the place where the “elite” belonged – and, honestly, I kind of felt overqualified. We’re taught always to show our manners– “excuse me,” “pardon me”– and have respect towards other–“yes, sir,” “yes, ma’am,” “no, sir,” “no, ma’am”– and here I was, Washington D.C. of all places, and I was surrounded by the rudest people I had ever seen. People were pushing people as they walked by; insults about someone’s mother came in one ear and out the other. I was distraught.

Just as I was about to give up hope on the country I believed in so wholeheartedly, a man with a cane strolled by and stopped in front of me. “Excuse me, little man. I’ll be out of your way in a second,” he said, looking down on me with a half smirk. Next thing I know, the man gets out his own wallet and puts a crisp \$100 bill in a homeless man’s hands. Then, he walked away. This smelly, ragged-looking man – he had to be around 45 or so – seemed ever so pleased with this man’s actions. And so was I.

A couple days rolled by, and the day of the Presidential Inauguration



PAMELA SMITH *Pocket Watches*

## Brandon Goble

arrived. Afterwards, we saw a motivational speaker: the man from two days prior. The stranger introduced himself as Erik Weihenmayer, a blind man who climbed Mt. Everest (at that moment, I finally realized his “cane” wasn’t a cane at all). He told us about how being blind actually gave him an advantage in life. He said that everyone nowadays judges others by how he/she perceives them. By not being able to see, he’s maintained his moral sense of right and wrong. He told us about his charity work, how he has kept believing in himself, and how we should never let anyone tell us what we can and can’t do.

Here I am, almost six years later, and his words still keep me going. By knowing that he’s still out there, speaking to scared children – just as I was those few years ago – I know that we’re slowly getting better. I know that with him doing what he’s doing, kids will believe in kindness again. That’s why I make it my duty to stay positive and spread kindness to those I meet; I know Erik wouldn’t expect anything less of me. I believe in finding the kindness of others. I believe everyone can find the incentive to better him/herself. This I believe.



SUE ENGLISH

*Pike Building*



William J. Loftus

**A Story about the Other Eternity and the Other Garden, or  
The Songs the Angels Sing ...**

Once upon a time in the beginning of things, all was going well until ... When Lilith left the Garden, she was singing the songs the angels sing, as she had spent that part of eternity that she had existed listening to them and trying to learn them, while Adam busied himself with the naming of the animals. She knew, call it her first intuition, that the songs would need to be kept alive as she saw the end of the Garden coming in the behaviors of Adam, and his need for control of everything, including her. She knew that these songs would be like the songs that mothers would need to sing to their children, though she and Adam had not yet created a child, which would have made her a mother, and so she worked the songs over and over in her voice, mind and soul until they became the story I'm about to tell.

You probably already know the story about the first control problem that grew between some of the angels and God about humans having an immortal soul, and how things turned to greed and jealousy and led to the battles between the angels. Eventually and similarly came Adam's control and anger about things that Lilith had seen coming for a long time, and so she left the Garden, not in anger, but just as a means to calm herself and to find another way to be in this world. As she did not return, and as Adam did not come looking for her to apologize and make peace, she learned that Adam had asked God to make him someone new, someone submissive to his will, and that God did so using one of Adam's ribs. And then the fall of humans from eternity into mortality came to pass when Adam and Eve's lack of control led them to greed and jealousy, but Lilith was long gone and so suffered through none of what she would later call the sin of the first eternity, and its ending for all but her.

Lilith wandered for what became now many years, as she knew nothing of the world outside the Garden, but she remembered God having spoken once of a place he had named Provence, in the south of what he called France, where he had placed everything that was left over from when the

world was created. She had decided to go there, but that took a long time because places did not yet have names, nor time meaning. One day when she was walking, a strong wind came funneling down a vast valley fueled by the cold air from the mountains that she had crossed, and the wind following a river, made a whistling noise that when she leaned into it, it sounded as if it had a few notes from the angels' songs. So she listened and, indeed, it began to form a few of the words, and she smiled to herself and thought that she must have found Provence, the Other Garden.

She built a small house near the seacoast near the mouth of the river and she spent her days there just enjoying and exploring all the things that God had left after creation, which it turned out, was quite a bit, like pure white horses and pink flamingos and fields of aromatic lavender, and beautifully colored small mountain formations that framed wondrous valleys and made for fantastic sunrises and sunsets. She came to believe that she had truly found what she called the Other Garden.

Many years later, the humans who had originally settled in the caves spread out from them and came into the valley where she lived and built a small town, and she lived among them. They were very artistic and spiritual people and they named the river, the Rhone, and the wind, the Mistral. Though she never aged because she was still eternal without having participated in the sin of the first eternity, they came to revere her as someone special and she just went along with that and tried to teach them the way things were before mortality, and they loved and cherished the stories, and greatly enjoyed when she sang the songs that the angels sing.

Then one early Spring, as the seasons, too, were eventually named, a traveling gypsy group, populated by wandering and exploring and generally peaceful people, in whom she saw much of herself in her early days out of the Garden searching for Provence, came to town and she was struck by their music and wandering life, and she studied them looking for what she felt was some spiritual and blessed connection. One night, as the Mistral wind blew and the gypsies played and sang and danced, a thought grew in her mind to have a child. Shortly thereafter, she had a long talk with God, who still visited her from time to time, and she decided to trade her eternity for a daughter, as she was becoming tired of eternity and wanted to feel this mortal life, with its pure pains and pleasures, like childbirth, and to leave some of herself in this Other Garden. So she and

God spoke at length about this and that and then the decision was agreed to and the potential made done through the powers of the Holy Spirit.

How this happened was very interesting and began one very dark night when the Mistral wind was howling especially loud. It woke her, and she stepped out into the dark and felt a strange warmth come upon her. She began to sing the songs the angels sing as if they were being drawn out of her body, and then the wind joined her in the singing and the songs grew and grew in volume and strength. Then she felt the presence of something upon her skin, and her body grew warm and her heart raced and her breath came and went in gasps, and then she swooned and was lost in a tingling all over and through her body. Her mind blanked and her soul trembled, and she fell from the hold of the wind to the ground in total exhaustion, and the wind and the songs that the angels sing suddenly stopped, and she fell deeply asleep.

When she woke she felt tired, which she had never felt before, and hungry, which she had never felt before, and stiff in her muscles, and all these sensations were new, and she realized that what she was feeling was mortality. She smiled and walked in to the small village to gather what she knew she would now need for the first time in her life. On her walk into the village, God came to her and shared that He had used this opportunity of her trade of eternity for a child to do something much larger for humans and hoped that she would understand. He said that she would receive not just her child, as she had originally bargained, but that all humans, too, would get a special child, the Son of God. God explained that from her special night before, a daughter was immaculately conceived in her through the Holy Spirit, and also was another daughter immaculately conceived in Anne, in a faraway place from Provence, and that, that daughter would grow up to be the mother who would be named Mary. Mary would, in turn, bear the special child, who would be the Son of God, who would be born upon a journey such as the one that had brought her to Provence and that He, the Son of God, who through his life, would be part of a larger promised plan to provide a means for all humans to have a passage to the other eternity.

God explained that immaculate conception meant that Lilith's and Anne's daughters would be born free of the sin of the first eternity and that they would both be filled with sanctifying Grace, and therefore dif-

ferent than all other humans. All of this information overwhelmed Lilith, and her mortality was so new to her, and the conversation with God so strange and confusing, that she chose to think that God knew best and as she knew nothing of conception, immaculate or otherwise, she focused simply on getting to the village for provisions.

Lilith was with child the appropriate time and then one silent and still night to her was born a daughter as promised, and Lilith named her Seery, for the gypsy people, who she credited with having created the idea for a daughter in her mind back before she had struck her bargain with God. Seery grew, played and flourished, and enjoyed a special relationship with God, who seemed to come more often to visit Lilith than He had before, and He even helped Lilith teach Seery the songs that the angels sing, as Lilith, now slowly aging in her mortality, had occasionally become sometimes forgetful. As Seery grew and Lilith aged, the townspeople began to revere Seery the same way that they held Lilith in such high esteem, and Seery became a leader and a servant to the people, teaching them things that her mother and God had taught her.

Time passed and Lilith grew ever older and the people noticed this and thought that she was sick or dying, but as she had been eternal, her mortality progressed much more slowly than the people's, but the signs were there. Then came another strange night, which also awakened her, and when she stepped outside the Mistral wind was again blowing and singing the songs that the angels sing. That same strange physical experience came over her again and she felt like the days before her mortality. In the distance she saw a boat floundering just off shore. She quickly woke Seery, and drew her to her side, and then as if possessed, they together began to sing the songs that the angels sing. They ran to the shore and both opened their arms. The cloaks that they had wrapped around themselves became long and bound together miraculously, and extended and spanned out to the boat and wrapped around the bow, and gently steered the boat to shore before them. The passengers inside were five ladies and two men, and they were so excited in their rescue, and grateful and exhausted, and yet they seemed to somehow know Lilith. The villagers came and everyone shared in the assisting of the travelers to safety and warmth and sleep. The next morning when the rescued travelers were more recovered and collected, Lilith and the travelers exchanged stories of their travels and

then they understood the connections. The three Marys, Martha, Sara, Lazarus and Joseph, were part of what happened to Jesus, who they called the Son of God, in his life and at his crucifixion, death and resurrection, as you may also know that story.

One Mary was Mary Salome, the mother of the apostles James and John, and related to Jesus' mother, Mary, who was the one immaculately conceived by Anne that special night when Lilith so too conceived Seery.

The second was Mary Jacobe, sister to Joseph, Jesus' father. Sara was the child maid to Mary Jacobe and of gypsy lineage. The third was Mary Magdalene, who was great with child, and who was sister to Martha and Lazarus. The travelers told the story of Lazarus being raised from the dead by Jesus.

Lastly, Joseph of Arimethia, uncle to Mary Magdalene, Martha and Lazarus. Joseph of Arimethia had provide the tomb for Jesus after his death, and from where he rose from the dead, and whose ship it was that the travelers had escaped in from Alexandria before being abducted and persecuted by the Romans for their associations with Jesus.

As things came to be known and now better understood, Lilith remembered that special night of the passing of her eternity and she understood that what God had spoken of was this man, Jesus, who through the immaculate conception of Mary through the Holy Spirit within Anne, and also herself that same night, in what was more than a request and an agreement, but something much larger in God's never-ending plans.

The time between the rescue and the coming to understand the connections was short, when Mary Magdalene's time to give birth had arrived, and so the woman prepared to assist her. It was a quick and beautiful birth. It was a girl, and she was named Lily for her innocence, beauty and purity, and to honor her rescuers. Lily was passed to each of the many women in the room and when Lilith finally held her, she slowly rose up with the child in her arms and they both began to glow, and breathlessly the songs that the angels sing came from her mouth, and then Seery joined in, raising the volume and power of the songs. As the songs the angels sing grew louder and louder, the Mistral wind outside joined in and all around everyone was astonished, and then strangely everything became silent. Then it was only Lily eerily singing alone in the most perfect voice. Lilith slowly and quietly began to slip toward the floor as Seery quickly took

hold of Lily from her mother's arms. One of the Marys helped her to the floor and slowly closed her eyes, for Lilith was dead. She had passed into the other eternity. A throng of angels came for her soul, singing the songs that the angels sing, and all was well and good in the Other Garden.

That small town in Provence in the south of France would come to be called Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer, Saint Marys of the Sea, which I visited a few years ago and where I first came to know this story. I often reflect upon the story of Lilith and Seery and Lily and the songs that the angels sing and the small village of Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer in Provence in the south of France, and I take personal note of all the exchanges, large and small, that we all make of one eternity for the other, every day for the rest of our other eternity. And that is all of the story that I plan to share with you now. Amen.

Thomas Matijasic

**Martin Fishman**

I died in 1967 at the age of thirteen. The circumstances of my death are not all together clear to me, but I will relate them as best I can. Whenever one thinks of 1967, the images that come to mind are of the “Summer of Love” in San Francisco, of rioting in Detroit, or anti-war protests outside of the Pentagon. Yes, I saw those images on a black-and-white television screen. What I saw in color were little league baseball fields, the annual Fourth of July parade, and the sight and sounds of a small town in the Midwest.

It is a popular cliché to say that the puberty years are confusing years. In reality, all periods of one’s life are pretty confusing. However, the trials of middle school are long remembered. You’re not really a kid any more. If you are a young man, you are intensely interested in women, but in the abstract. Those naked beauties that you see in Playboy only vaguely resemble the real girls in your eighth grade class. Where do the bunnies live and do they really look like that?

Due to the changing nature of your body, psyche, and hormones, you generally have tremendous anxiety about your future. In an attempt to discover the direction of their lives, many young teens turn to the occult. I had two first cousins (one a year older than I, the other a year younger) who lived in the town of Mahoning Falls, Ohio. Mahoning Falls, population 6,000, was best known for two wooden, covered bridges and a great Fourth of July celebration. George, the older of my two cousins, was tall, kind and intelligent. A talented musician, he introduced us all to the sounds of Jimi Hendrix and Eric Clapton. He was also obsessed with the paranormal and read extensively on the subject. Fred, his younger brother, was very mechanically gifted. He was both humorous and hot tempered. Fred loved to pull pranks and his love of the fair gender emerged early and with great intensity. I spent a great deal of time with my cousins during the summer months. We were never bored when we were together. We rode bikes on country roads, attempted to play pop songs on our musical

instruments, hung out at the local Dairy Queen, and did our best to flirt with any available young lady.

In our quest to learn our personal destinies, my cousins and I turned to the great occult figure of Mahoning Falls, Martin Fishman. No one called Fishman by his first name. He was simply “Fishman.” Fishman was an outcast. His family was poor and they lived in a small, run-down house by the town dump. He was a large boy, considered fat by the standards of the day. He was blessed from an early age with a deep, gravelly voice. His clothes came primarily from the Goodwill Store and they were only washed infrequently. He had few friends and was frequently taunted at school. Like any mistreated, junkyard dog, he became mean. Cousin Fred was one of the few kids to befriend him. I don’t really know if Fred liked Fishman, but Fred loved to fight. Defending Fishman gave him a good excuse to punch a few dime store bullies and look heroic. As a result, Fishman was fiercely loyal to Fred.

Everybody in a small town must carve out his niche. When he was about ten years old, Fishman found his niche. Fishman became acquainted with George through his friendship with Fred, and from George, Fishman became acquainted with the literature of the occult. Once introduced to the subject, Fishman embraced it. He read every book available to him on the subject. By the age of eleven, he was using Tarot cards to tell fortunes. He learned to read palms. He saved money from cutting lawns and raking leaves to buy a Ouija board. By the time he was twelve, he was holding full-blown séances. He never became popular, but he did gain respect. In fact, among the students at Mahoning Falls Middle School, he was generally feared, which was fine with him. He understood that it was more important to be feared than loved if you were an outcast. Both adults and teens would sometimes pay Fishman to attend their parties in order to conduct fortune-telling sessions or séances. Of course, neither group would ever have considered inviting him to their parties as a guest.

By the time he was fourteen, Fishman was an accomplished showman as well as being a Master of the Occult. He would arrive at a party wearing an old, black suit, worn-out tennis shoes, and a dirty white T-shirt. His thick, greasy black hair would be slicked back and he wore his mother’s black eye-liner to accent his dark brown eyes. He stood about 6’1” and weighed about 280 pounds. After entering the house of a party-giver, he

would loudly announce, “I am Fishman! Why have you summoned me?” Some of the girls would giggle. A few boys might heckle him, but he ignored them. He would command a candle. When it was brought to him, he would light it and place it in the center of a table. He would then demand that the electric lights be turned off and that everyone be seated around the table. Usually there were seven to twelve guests at these gatherings and everyone had to participate. He would direct that the guests hold hands. Once they did, he would murmur some bizarre incantations in a language that only he understood. With head bowed, he would fall into a trance. Suddenly, his head would snap back, and his voice would roar in an unfamiliar tone announcing that he was a particular spirit and asking why he had been brought into this house. His eyes would roll to the top of their sockets. His hands would squeeze the hands of those sitting closest to him. He would begin to sweat and quiver. If no one said anything, he would shout even louder, “Why have you brought me here! What is it that you want to know?”

Eventually, one of the guests would ask him a question: “Is my dead grandmother in heaven?” “Will I marry John Smith?” “Does Doris Brown really love me?” “Will I be rich?” “Do all gym teachers burn in hell after they die?” Fishman would answer these questions with great authority. After a half an hour to forty-five minutes, he would again fall into a trance. When he emerged from this second trance, the show would be over. Appearing exhausted, he would collect his fee and leave. For a short time, the partygoers would discuss his revelations. They would drink, hook up, gossip, and dance. Fishman was soon forgotten. He walked home alone in the dark to the house near the dump. He slept well knowing that he had earned some badly needed money. He despised his peers, but he needed their money. They despised him, but he was the best show in their little town. He was a *must* if you were going to have a cool party.

Lisa Major lived across the street from George and Fred. We had all grown up together, but in the summer of 1967, we began to look at Lisa differently. She was, shall we say, blossoming. Early in the summer, George had “gone steady” with Lisa. They even kissed a few times before “breaking up.” Later Lisa went steady with Fred, but she caught him kissing another girl behind the rec center during a teen dance. I was very interested in Lisa myself and would always find an excuse to go over to her house when vis-

iting George and Fred. Fortunately, she had a younger brother and there was a basketball hoop on the side of their garage.

It was early August, but rather cool for that time of year. We were in the basement of my cousins’ home. George was on keyboard, Frank and I were on guitars, Lisa’s younger brother Paul was playing George’s bass, and a kid named Al was playing drums. After several hours, our jam session was broken up by a knock on the side door. It was Fishman and he was his usual, profane self. We conversed in the basement for about an hour. Al left near twilight to return home and eat supper. Following his departure, Paul suggested holding a *séance*. Fishman was reluctant to conduct the proceeding because he said he was tired, but we talked him into it. We lit a candle and placed it on a workbench. Fishman sat on a large wooden chair, the rest of us on metal folding chairs arranged in a circle. George sat to Fishman’s right and Fred to his left. I sat between Fred and Paul. We joined hands and Fishman began to induce himself into a trance. About five minutes into the trance, Fishman asked, “Who do you wish to contact?” Fred replied, “The Ripper?” Fishman opened one eye and responded, “Are you sure that’s who you want?” Fred said, “I’m sure.” Fishman paused and then forcefully stated, “I command the Ripper. I command the Ripper!”

Fishman’s head slumped forward. All was tranquil. Suddenly, his head snapped back and Fishman’s eyes opened with a red glow. His fist violently slammed the table and he shouted, “Who disturbs my slumber? Who dares to summon me to this ridiculous place?”

“I do!” shouted Fred defiantly. “You will tell me what I want to know or I will send you back to hell where you belong!” Paul’s arm was visibly shaking and he clutched my hand so tightly that the blood was cut off to my fingers. “Don’t test me, you insolent bastard or I will drag you back to hell with me when I go. Now what do you want to know?”

Fred’s question was clear and straight to the point: “Will my brother become the greatest rock star ever?” The Ripper’s answer was far more vague, but it was prophetic: “Your brother’s greatest music will be written after he is dead. Thousands will come to see him perform. Ten of thousands will buy his records. But for all the money he makes, he will never be able to buy back what he will lose. Horror will come at night and the man I am speaking through will be dead by the end of the week. You can’t change anything. It is out of your control. By God, you will rue the day

when you summoned this spirit! There will be much suffering for all of you.” The Ripper laughed. Then Fishman’s head slumped again, and after a few minutes, he opened his eyes and spoke in his normal gravelly tone.

When the séance ended, Paul jumped to his feet and nervously squeaked, “I’ve got to get home.” He ran up the stairs and out the front door. Fishman looked exhausted. George got him a glass of water and a towel to wipe the sweat from his forehead. We all sat silently as the candle burned low. Finally Fishman said that he had to return home because his mother was waiting for him. He moved slowly up the steps and then exited into the night.

After Fishman departed, I turned to George and said, “Man, that was weird, even for Fishman.” Fred quickly threw in his two cents, “Oh, it’s all bullshit. I love Fishman, but it’s all a show and no one does it better than the big man.” George waited to speak, but he expressed the feeling that Fishman was on the level that night: “I don’t think he was faking it. Whatever he tapped into was real. I don’t know if the spirit that possessed him was telling the truth, but that wasn’t Fishman talking.” Fred’s laconic response was just as emphatic: “Bullshit, bullshit, bullshit.”

News of Fishman’s death that very night hit us like a thunderbolt. Apparently, he was walking home from the séance along the railroad tracks headed for home. He accidentally stepped into a nest of timber rattlers in between two wooden ties. He was bitten on the right heel and on his left ankle. The shock of the snake attack caused him to fall forward and to the left. He hit his head on a steel rail so hard that it cracked his skull. His body wasn’t found until the next day when a group of workmen saw Fishman’s lifeless body.

Fred had a difficult time accepting the death of his eccentric friend. Fishman’s mother was extremely poor and burial arrangements were very limited. The coroner examined the body within hours of its discovery and declared the death to be accidental. He was sent to a local funeral home. His burial took place the next day, with the wake occurring one hour before the service. Fishman’s mother requested that Fred, George, Paul and I act as pallbearers. We recruited two other friends to help us with the casket. We were the only ones, apart from his mother, who attended the funeral. Since the Fishmans didn’t belong to a church, Fred and George were each asked to say a few words about their fallen friend. Frankly, I

can’t remember what either of them said. I just kept wondering what timber rattlers were doing so far north and in the middle of town.

Mrs. Fishman sat quietly through the ceremony. She looked older than her years and appeared to be completely isolated. You might say that mentally, she was in her own world. Unable to afford a cemetery plot, her son was buried in her backyard with a simple wooden cross to mark the grave. She died two days later and was buried next to her son. There was really no known cause of death other than loneliness and a broken heart.

I didn’t see Fred and George every week. I lived in a suburb of Ohltown, about twenty-five miles to the east of Mahoning Falls. I generally visited my cousins every other week and sleep-overs were common in the summer. About a month after Fishman died, I decided to spend the weekend with Fred and George. It was late August and the nights were getting cool. During the afternoon, we played basketball at Lisa’s house. While shooting hoops, we decided to get together after dark and build a campfire in the high weeds near the edge of the woods behind my uncle’s property. My aunt and uncle had plans that evening and we were left alone. Fred and I mixed together metal shavings with sulfur and gunpowder from firecrackers in order to create a shocking surprise for our campfire guests.

When the sun disappeared behind the trees, we took armloads of firewood into the high weeds and dug a small pit for the fire. We lined the pit with rocks so the fire could not spread into the dry vegetation. We then returned to the house. About 8:30 p.m., Lisa, Paul and Paul’s friend Aaron came to the door. They helped us carry some lawn chairs and a cooler to the campfire. The six of us sat in a circle and told jokes and stories until the night grew dark. About 10 p.m., only the fire light illuminated our little circle and you couldn’t see much beyond the tall weeds at our backs. Lisa was looking particularly fetching that night in her blue jeans and oversized sweatshirt.

Fred suggested we hold a séance. Paul and Aaron seemed a little reluctant given the recent death of Fishman. Lisa didn’t express an opinion, but she looked pensive. Fred was persuasive and triumphant. We held hands. Fred began his mumbo-jumbo routine. Finally he said, “What spirit should we call?” I replied, “The Ripper!” Paul quickly whimpered, “No, no no the Ripper.” I repeated, “Call the Ripper!” “The Ripper it is,” said Frank.

In a very dramatic and loud voice Frank shouted, “I call upon the Rip-

per to come to us now! To show himself to us now! To kill us *now!*” Just as he finished, I threw our “magic mixture” into the fire which immediately created sparks and a bad smell. Lisa, Paul and Aaron jumped to their feet and I believe that Aaron actually peed on himself. Fred and I burst into laughter. The others called us bad names but also began laughing at their overreaction to our prank. Once everyone settled down, we took turns telling ghost stories. About a half hour later, I heard a distant, high-pitched howl coming from the darkness. Fred looked at me and said, “Did you hear that?”

“Yeah,” I said, “maybe we should head back in.” The others were not impressed. George accused us of plotting another prank once we went into the weeds to head home. Lisa and Paul agreed.

We sat for a few minutes patiently listening for any sound that could be heard beyond the crackle of the campfire. Suddenly, a huge roar belled from the weeds just beyond where we were sitting. All six of us jumped and huddled together near the fire. Maybe we were hoping that the light of the flames would protect us from the darkness. We waited for what seemed like hours but was more likely minutes. Using the electric light near the backdoor as our guide, we slowly made our way through the weeds to the safety of the house.

We never really knew what creature made that blood-curdling cry. It may have been a feral dog or a coyote passing through the area. It may even have been a black bear heading toward the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains. Intellectually, I’m sure there is a logical explanation. But we were teenagers and we all knew emotionally that we had heard the final howl of Fishman as he moved from this world to the next. Certainly this world hadn’t treated him very well. I’ve got to say that I’m kind of grateful that he gave us one last scare before he departed.

Jordan Pack

### Mamaw’s First Gift

In September of 1925, a young Apollonia Panagakos hopped on the rickety wooden boat harbored in Thessaloniki, the largest city in the Macedonian region of northern Greece. Her long, curly black hair, a trademark of so many from the Balkans, caught in the breeze coming from the sea before her. Her eyes were as blue as the water itself and could pierce even the densest stone. Donning a deep blue babushka and sporting an Eastern Orthodox cross and a five-foot-and-two-inch-tall stature, Apollonia was taking on the world. Isolated from all she had known, she trekked the long and labored journey thousands of miles across the Mediterranean, then the Atlantic. More than two months later, she found herself standing on another island in another harbor of another city, this time much greater in size. A towering, mint green, torch-bearing statue dominated the skyline behind her as she stepped off the boat that she now despised. Her English was minimal; unfortunately, at the time, the Greek population in New York City wasn’t nearly as large as it is today. Just a drop in the bucket of five-and-a-half million others, Apollonia was asked her name for the records, like all the people in front of her had been and all the people behind her would be. She responded, “Polly.”

During the Great War that ended just a few years before, Polly had decided that she was getting out of Europe. Now, in the cold November air of late 1925, Polly was spending her seventeenth birthday in Astoria, Queens. It was no Thessaloniki, but it was sufficient for the time being. Especially convenient was the fact that the ethnic makeup of the neighborhood was mainly Jewish and Polish. Polly found a job working at an Astoria deli and spent her first few years in America selling meats to Poles, Jews, and the occasional Greek.

Eventually, though, Polly grew weary of her day-in, day-out deli job. A year after she had arrived in the country, she had developed enough English skills to suffice her virtually anywhere in the nation. Somehow (and the details surrounding this are generally obscured), she caught word of a

booming business in the deep hills of central Appalachia. Coal towns were popping up from Pennsylvania to Tennessee and North Carolina. Maybe the areas most affected by this boom were the central Appalachian states of Virginia, West Virginia, and Kentucky. Poor, rural eastern Kentucky (which would remain that way for a bit longer) was catching a glimmer of hope: the black seam that seemed to snake through the mountains themselves was now becoming the tangible economy. When all of these coal jobs began popping up, other jobs did, too. Always a passionate traveler, Polly planned to move from Astonia to a small town in northeastern Kentucky named Ashland to find a new job. Directly prior to her move, one event changed her life. The night before Polly departed from her home for the second time in four years, a racially-motivated bar fight broke out right across the street from Polly's tenement. An inebriated white man walked into the neighborhood watering hole and shot Mr. Burns, a black man who had become close friends with Polly during her time in Queens. Traumatized, Polly was glad to leave Astonia. She never returned to New York.

A few train rides later, Polly exited the terminal in Ashland, Kentucky. It was the start of a new year, 1930. Polly luckily found a job at the general store just south of the main city in what is today Catlettsburg, but soon quit and opened her own small café in the town, which she aptly named Apollonia's Thessaloniki. This feat was practically unbelievable – just a year earlier, Black Tuesday had rocked the industrialized world and destroyed the job market. In most cases, she would have surely failed; luckily, her traditional Greek and Balkan cooking – “The culture of Hellas is food and dancing,” she'd say – was exotic to the locals who found it delicious; her diner soon became very successful. She developed both a passion and a niche for food. Her mix between the Greek diet and the local cuisine was unmatched. By 1933, people came from all across the region to try dishes from Ms. Polly's diner. Now fluent in English but retaining a thick accent that she would never lose, Polly acquired some regulars in her kitchen. One of them was named Lee Tackett, a man from somewhere south of Ashland that Polly didn't recognize but imagined as charming anyway, and a man from whom I get my middle name. Lee and Polly became close and married in 1937.

Now, the coal business dominated the economy of eastern Kentucky, and, somehow (again, nobody quite knows how), Lee convinced Polly to

move back to his hometown in Floyd County in search of work. At the end of Polly's third and final move, she settled down in the dark valleys of Kentucky's rugged eastern forests and coalfields, in a tiny coal town known as “McDowell.” It was here that Polly had her first two children: Cleveland and Girly Mae. With the end of the Great Depression, the second Great War ravaged Europe. Many young men were drafted across America – Lee was one of them. Polly didn't see Lee again until 1944. When he arrived back in Kentucky, he immediately resumed his mining job. They had their third child in 1945 – my grandfather, Perry Tackett.

Now, by this time, Polly had nearly perfected her cooking methods. She could make a gyro with fresh cucumber tzatziki sauce just as quick as fried chicken and dumplings, and she was visited by people from all across the spectrum – Lee's coworkers in the mines, local mayors and judges, and yes, even Governor Earle C. Clements. According to Lee, Governor Clements commented that Polly made “the best Greek food he had ever tasted,” to which Polly would laugh and reply, “Bless him, that Mister Clements. It was probably the only Greek food he had ever tasted.”

By the early sixties, Perry and Cleveland had moved to Ann Arbor, Michigan, to work in Detroit. In 1967, Perry had his first daughter, my mother, Sherry. Shortly thereafter, Perry's wife, Brenda, insisted that the couple move their daughter away from their dangerous, bars-on-the-window life in Ann Arbor back to peaceful east Kentucky. Perry agreed and moved back near his own parents, and Cleveland followed close behind. Now, Polly met her first granddaughter in the midst of the Civil Rights Era.

One of my family's favorite stories to tell and hear begins in this age of reform and change. When my grandfather announced to Polly that he was bringing my grandma and my mother home from Michigan, she was overjoyed that she was finally going to meet her granddaughter, but she was also fearful of the local environment that her grandchild was entering. Today, Kentucky is often grouped in the Midwest, but in the late sixties, it was just as much a part of the south as Georgia. Segregation was common and racism was a disease that was usually passed down through each generation. Polly had been terrified of race crimes and found the idea of racism frankly disgusting; whenever she witnessed or heard of it, she thought back of when she first arrived in the country. She thought about life as a new immigrant – different from all others in language and culture.



She thought about how, though now she was Old Regular Baptist, she was looked down upon for her Eastern Orthodox belief system. Perhaps more than anything else, Polly thought back about Mr. Burns, her close friend from Astoria who was practically murdered just because of his race, something that seemed so foreign to her, and she remembered how the authorities frankly didn't care.

Thus, Polly's first gift to my mother was a baby doll with dark, African-American skin, in honor of Mr. Burns. My great grandmother, "Mamaw Polly" as she became called by the family, didn't stop there. Mamaw Polly decided that she would set aside one of these dolls for each of her grandchildren to come. She made it a point to stress racial equality to the grandkids, and, somewhat against the culture, she loved relentlessly and unconditionally, a tradition that is still taught in the family today.

Later, when Mom told Mamaw Polly (now in her frail and feeble condition due to advanced cancer and not having spoken for quite some time) about her engagement with Dad, Mamaw rose up from her hospital bed, removed her mask, and said in her thick accent, "It's about time!" These were some of the last words that Mamaw said, as she died of cancer shortly thereafter in a November not unlike the one during which she arrived here. Papaw Lee never got over the loss – a week before Mom and Dad were married, he died of a heart attack. They found him sitting in a chair in the middle of his horse barn, clutching one of my Mom's horse show trophies in his arm and all her other ones surrounding him, along with a photo of Mamaw.

My great-grandmother's love for food, family, and faith is something that I hope to carry on today. The stories that my family recalls of her bring us plenty of tears, laughter, and joy each time we hear them, and I wouldn't have it any other way. Even though she's gone, her tradition is carried on today – each new child in the family is given a doll of a different ethnicity before anything else when they're born, and they're taught the same thing Mamaw taught: love.



PAMELA SMITH

*Clock Tower*

Phyllis Puffer

### The Customer is Always Right

The high lighter did not work. It definitely did not work. Not a single yellow mark would appear on the newspaper over an important quote, no matter how hard the instrument was pressed against the page.

Based on my experience in Germany and the Czech Republic, I suspected it would not be easy. Nonetheless, I decided to try returning the high lighter as a cross cultural experiment/adventure.

The convenience store where I had bought the high lighter was located in a corner of a huge open space in the student center on the campus of the University of Botswana. A goodly number of chairs stacked along one side of the open area indicated that the space was used for large gatherings and performances of various kinds. On one side of the shop entrance was a wall of post office boxes with bright red doors and stark white, round knobs in the centers. The campus post office was located on the other side. Through the store's open door, for all to see and beware, was a blue uniformed security guard sitting on a chair. Inside the store to the right of the guard sat another guard. And then, just to be certain the store was adequately protected, a third guard sat in a booth to the left of the entrance. One other person was in the booth with the third guard. It was the manager.

The manager was a young man, rather good looking, of an attractive latte color, wearing a navy blue jacket. I approached his side of the administrative box, presented the high lighter and the receipt, and stated the problem.

"It does not work."

The manager neither smiled nor frowned. He took the high lighter and ran it over a piece of paper. The tip was hard and desert dry like the land outside. It did not make a mark.

"You left it uncapped."

His tone was not sarcastic, accusing, or attacking as I had experienced in Europe. It was calm and unemotional.

"No. It was that way when I took it out of the package."

"Where is the package?"

"It was all torn up. I put it in the trash."

"I need the package."

"But the package was torn into pieces. It's in the trash."

The young man was beginning to be exasperated, but this was not turning into the war I had experienced in a shoe repair shop in Germany or in an optical shop in the Czech Republic.

To strengthen my case, I added, "I'm a good customer. I've been here several times."

"I've never seen you."

"I've been here."

How could he have missed the only pale face who ever came into the building, employee or customer? Color blindness is a good thing, but this was over doing it.

"I need the bar code from the package."

"You have the receipt."

The manager was beginning to look minutely irritated.

"I need the bar code."

He began searching through papers. He left his box briefly and returned with papers. He looked through papers. He went over to the cashier with the high lighter and the papers. He said a few words to the cashier. I went over to the cashier. She gave me seven pula and 95 thebe, a cent or two less than one dollar.

"Next time, just throw it in the trash."

Back in the US, at our local hardware store in my mountain town, still operating healthily in spite a well-patronized Wal-Mart on the edge of town, I brought in a tub stopper. It was a shade too large. No matter how it was turned or tipped this way or that or scrutinized closely, it did not fit. The young woman at the cash register looked at it casually. She said blandly, "Do you have the package?"

"No. It's torn up and I put it in the trash."

"I have to have the bar code."

The stopper went back home with me.

Phyllis Puffer

**Danger in Zimbabwe**

Forget violent revolution. That's over with. Forget repressive government which will throw you in jail suddenly for no reason. Forget crime. No worse than elsewhere and maybe better than in downtown Detroit or LA. Forget a disastrous economy. No worse than lots of other places and better than before. Forget being eaten by a tiger. Tigers are in India.

Beware of...

Over waxed, over polished floors.

And nobody listening to complaints.

The British, presumably, brought floor wax to the country and waxed the floors will be.

And waxed, and waxed, and waxed, and...

Wood floors, linoleum floors, stone/cement entrances to buildings. It would not surprise me if they waxed wall to wall carpeting.

Clearly, this is a country where nobody sues anybody for broken legs, slipped disks, sprained ankles, damaged vertebrae, broken or sprained wrists, bruised ribs. The lawyers of Harare, Bulawayo, Victoria Falls, Masvingo and other places with pretensions of modernity should wake up to the profit potential of those waxed floors. Orthopedic surgeons should place their discrete professional announcements of availability outside hotels, restaurants, and office buildings alongside those of the lawyers.

I tried to correct the habits instilled by years of colonialism.

My budget hotel in Bulawayo was really very nice. The rooms were on two stories around a lovely patio filled with plants and walks and a fountain. My room was large, the shower down the hall was clean and overall not bad. A couple of times the hot water heater gave out, but the friendly staff heated a special pail of it for the wash basin in my room.

A middle aged, rather plump, white Zimbabwean ran it. She spoke in the British way, high pitched but softly, which somewhat reduced the bite, for me, of the way she often spoke to the staff. Nonetheless, I still felt sorry for them.

On a Monday morning, the youngish, smallish, thin black woman who seemed to be the general manager was explaining to the owner some untoward event over the weekend. "His story is –"

Owner cut her off sharply, "I don't care what his story is."

She rather fascinated me.

I pointed out to her the dangerous condition of the entrance. All she said was, "I noticed it myself when I came in this morning."

The tall, thin, young man in charge of waxing that entrance is, no doubt, still on his knees doing his duty to the hotel. He would be holding a flat can of floor wax resembling a can of shoe polish in his left hand. His right hand would be vigorously applying and polishing wax on that floor. And I'm pretty sure the entrance, which slanted upward making the situation worse, was made of cement.

Later, in Harare, where I spent a lot of time in the research institute, the situation was more serious. The little hall in front of the office where I spent most of my time, and up and down which I had to walk several times a day, had a section as slippery as an ice rink. I talked to one of the employees about it. She didn't react. I finally spoke to the assistant to the director. He listened, but made no comment and took no action. Finally, I complained to the waxer herself. I threatened to steal her can of wax and not give it back until my last day. No reaction. I settled into a pattern of scuffling carefully and slowing down when I came to that patch in the hall. And I complained to her whenever I could. Like about daily. I felt vindicated when one day an employee slipped with a yelp.

The waxer was a sweet, busy, industrious young woman, married to an equally admirable young man. The couple lived in a small house behind the modest but rather large former private residence where the institute was housed. It was a pretty house in small but attractive and well kept grounds. All of it walled and in a good suburb. The young man took care of the grounds, ran errands as needed, helped hand collate survey questionnaires, ran the Xerox machine, and helped keep the electrical generator operational. The institute's life-by-computer could not risk the vagaries of the Zimbabwe electricity supply. She did the cooking. About 11 a.m., I think it was, maybe 10, she prepared a big breakfast for everyone. She made fried egg sandwiches and tea and everyone came out of their offices, stood around in the kitchen, and ate. Then around 1 p.m. everyone

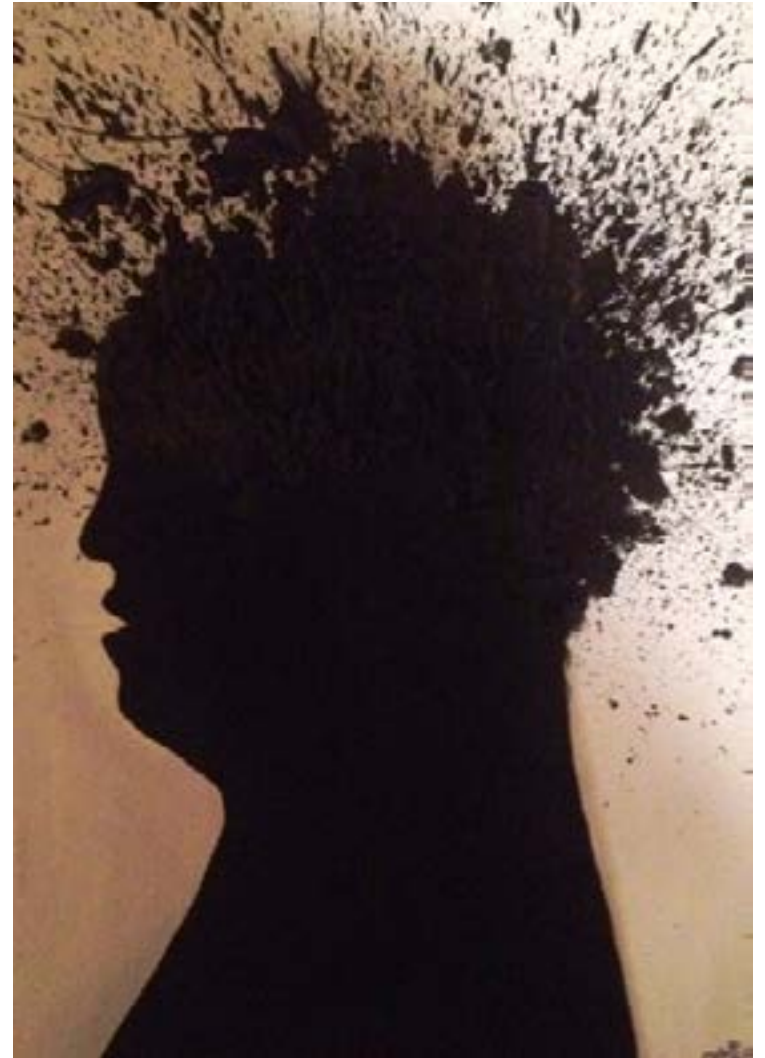
## Phyllis Puffer

sat in the back yard and had a very big lunch. The main dish was sadza, the center of the Zimbabwean diet and as well liked and as central as rice in Asian countries. It looked like the Botswana sorghum, only was white rather than beige. It looked like stiff cream of wheat. A gravy or stew was poured over it.

Her other responsibility at the institute was cleaning and daily waxing of that stupid hallway. Sometimes, she did it during the day. That gave me the perfect opportunity to harass her.

My final experience with danger to life and limb was the entrance to an upscale hotel where the institute held a conference. As befitted an important building, the entrance between sidewalk and opening doors was wide and at least looked expensive. It seems as if it were marble. When I saw it, my heart grew faint, as I knew without yet trying to walk on it that here was another experience on ice. Helpful brass hand rails stood on each side, but were somehow in useless locations for me. My first impression had been correct. I should have had skates.

I didn't complain. Complaint had been drained from me. It didn't occur to me at the time that they might have paid better attention than the others, if only in the possible future. If political and economic conditions improved for the country, they would be educated by litigious American guests.



DAKOTA COLLINS *Mind Blown*

Dimitri Bien-Aime (Dino)

**Music: “Tintim and Tomtom”**

Music is a set of notes translated  
through the song of the instruments,  
the symbiosis of the words that is stronger

than us. It is the smile that caresses  
our feelings by vibrating our hearts  
with the combination  
of do, re, mi, fa, sol, la, ti.  
healing of the broken hearts –  
the truth of our untold stories.

It is the murmuring of our traditions,  
the voice of our unstoppable thoughts.  
Music is the soul of our universal language.

It is the simplest expression  
of all verbal and nonverbal ideas  
connecting the inner and outer of our body.

It's in listening to it we sometimes take  
our strength back. Music is the complicity  
of our passion and our love. It is the dream to see

you and me dancing and singing tenderly  
the melodies that bind us together. Music  
is the memory of our first lovely meeting.

It is the unforgettable advice of our noon  
and midnight. It is the silence of the words talking-  
the charm of “tintim” and the look of “tomtom.”

Music! Music! Music? It's the symbol of our unity:  
The immortal conversation of our pasts, presents,  
and futures, the eternal legacy of the highs and lows.

Music is “Tintim and tomtom”  
of the dancing steps of all people.  
It is the electrification when we dance  
folklore, R&B, Samba, Salsa, and so on

Music is the sunset of our pillows  
by making us dream the hope of our wishes.  
It is the sunrise of our unknown destination.

Music is the heat of our winter heart,  
the forgiveness of our unacceptable words  
and the mercy of our happiness.



THOMAS J. WHITAKER

*Dying to Live*

Gayle Compton

### **Barbaric Yawp**

With one foot upon your doorstep  
I talk of unions, of baptism of the Holy Ghost and Israel  
as though I care about these things,  
spitting sidewise and nodding.

I need to speak of other things,  
to lean forward until I smell the tobacco on your breath,  
and tell you about a small boy's letter to Santa,  
the new red wagon in a crab grass yard,  
and the father who sold his shotgun.

I need to grasp your shoulder until I feel the bone  
beneath the skin,  
for I saw the reverend's bottle, tall as a steeple,  
and his honey-haired Bathsheba before the Sunday sermon,  
beautiful and bitter.  
I cannot keep my voice down when I talk about the garden,  
how I grew sorrowful in a festival of bees,  
pondering the child artist's crooked house,  
the chewed pencil and a longing to join  
the mad Crayola frieze above the blackboard.

Let me take off my coat and sit down.  
I will show you the clipping.  
He was 89 the paper said, stabbed by a youth in a Jesus shirt.  
I see two mothers weak from birth,

wetting infant locks, breast feeding, fathers bringing flowers.  
I will hold nothing back.  
Indeed, I caught their scent on the urban air  
like bitch dogs in heat, five abreast,  
blue bicycles wearing their fragrance,  
and in the hedged street, old men pretending not to look,  
pumping gas, buying shirts.

I have breathed the sulfurous smoke of the coal camp  
and seen the hump-shouldered miners come home  
to wives in rags and ribbons.

I did not fight the war but heard old soldiers tell  
how the orphans chased the tandems  
for a piece of penny candy  
until they fell beneath the wheels,  
their scarecrow hands still reaching.

I want to look you in the eye and tell you everything –  
how they bled and how I bleed.  
How in the same garden's fetid pool  
I plunge my own saving hands  
to give the Luna moth its seventh day.

### **The Dump**

*Indian Creek – 1959*

The smell of muddy creeks or an old book's heady musk  
always brings it back.  
Orville, the brother next to me, was forever the accomplice  
in those early crimes.

We slipped like Shawnee along the bank,  
warily bending willows, parting the dry horseweeds,  
leaping barefoot rock to rock,  
skinning our knees in torn overalls.

Flat on our stomachs,  
should the sun on our hair sound alarm,  
we watched the Martin's place,  
heard their loud soiree on the white stone porch,  
glad the ivy that climbed their fence hid us from them.

A pair of clever robbers,  
we took the dump in broad daylight,  
snatching the dripping stacks of *Life*, *Look* and *Post*,  
a bawling Dagwood, a rain-drenched Orphan Annie  
until our arms could hold no more.

We dared not speak of our nefarious deed,  
homeward speeding down the orchard path  
to spread and dry our treasure in the Indian summer sun.

### **The Wall**

*For PFC Charles Edward Osborne*

*2/5/46 – 2/7/66*

Please speak in whispers, the old soldier said.  
Where you are standing is hallowed ground.  
5 E-14. You won't have to kneel to read his name –  
then again, you might.

At last, in this sudden rain,  
I touch them gently,  
the white raised letters of your name –  
one of 58,000 – across this chosen field.

I see them clearly in another time  
sitting behind you in Mrs. Jones's fourth grade class,  
the awkward penciled letters  
on a borrowed sheet of Lucky Star notebook paper.

It is January and your bare toes are showing  
in shoes you try to hide beneath your desk.  
I'm wondering if you forgot your lunch again,  
if you will play Indian down by the creek  
until the bell rings.

You had no use for Alice and Jerry  
who wore shoes in the summer,  
who never caught a fish on a crawdad tail,  
played hooky, swam naked in the pine hole  
or felt the sting of the teacher's paddle.

You would never go to the senior prom  
or have a sweetheart wear your high school ring.  
Our principal said you were wasting your time.

Join the armed forces! he roared.  
Do something for your country.

At eighteen, you traded the cap and gown  
for an M-14 and the uniform of the Third Marines.  
Two years later, without Algebra I, Beowulf or Macbeth,  
you finished your assignment:  
Operation Rough Rider – KIA, Quang Nam.

I stand, mute and unworthy, to salute you.  
And with a single backward glance  
walk away  
knowing that because of you – and thousands  
named and unknown,  
I am free to go, beyond our rain-drenched flag  
and this field of sojourning spirits  
to places you will never go,  
but ever in the shadow of where you have been.





SUE ENGLISH

*Shoes*

Christopher Mulrooney

**the chocolate eater**

it is a balm like anything else  
against the tiresome torturers  
with their clammy hands on the mind  
Lubitsch worked all day at Paramount  
according to Billy Wilder to transform chicken shit  
in German say what is that for consumption



DAKOTA COLLINS *Chief*

Jesse Murrell

**ARockCroctic**

Rock and roll isn't noise pollution.  
Only the deprived think that is true.  
Listen and learn, rock's noise solution,  
love and peace is its message for you.  
It isn't the devil nor the sound of sin.  
Note the drifter, whose home is the road,  
Glad for rock records found in a bin.

Something ails your heart, my weary friend?  
Then may the Wild Horses guide you home,  
over the hills, beginning to end.  
No one should judge you; you are allowed to roam.  
Elsewise they shouldn't rule from their throne.  
So goes the saying "like a rolling stone."



PAMELA SMITH

*Me*

Susan Salisbury

**Ode to Gomer**

He had hair like the bright snow that glistened  
under the fluorescent light,

and white feathery eyebrows and eyelashes  
that encircled eyes of pink.

His translucent skin glowed like pale neon  
that warmed up to a pink hum  
every time he sat down that quart jar of moonshine.

And Lord, could he play that fiddle.  
Working it up into some kind of sweet bluegrass fury.

Late into the night, when the Mason jar held only an inch of shine,  
his skin burned red

and it made me wonder  
if that fiddle might catch fire from his touch.

But it never did, it only stammered to a slow halt.  
And then he left, walking zig zag into the night,

Fizzling out like some kind of  
Hillbilly Supernova

that's done come and gone.

Kenneth Slone

FOR HARLAN HUBBARD

I was reading Shantyboat last night on board my own boat.  
I often need to see water.  
I was rocking,  
Rising, and falling from the busied holiday weekend lake traffic.

You were off the boat  
Being commissioned to paint,  
Glad to be thought of as a painter who fished –  
Not a fisherman who painted.

The Trimble County preacher who had to seek you out  
To contract the painting to be hung on the wall behind his pulpit  
Never dreamed your watercolor river  
Was pre-drawn from floating the river Brent to the Bedford Bridge.

You would accept money only for the needed supplies,  
Reasoning that painting the scene sans pay  
Would bring you more pleasure  
And the freedom to please no others.

Others were pleased, however.  
The members met at a house that could be reached by car,  
A farm house you could reach easily enough by walking  
Along a winding river-leaving path.

The country dinner was served in your honor.  
You were surprised that art  
Pleasing to you  
Also pleased strangers.

I was enjoying your journals last night  
When I realized why your writing has been compared to Thoreau's.  
Creativity in your writing and your art  
Came from pleasing yourself.

**A “Homing” Place**

I have been new driving on curving roads that follow a river bed’s course.  
 The Big Sandy River winds narrowing as it reaches its font,  
 The Breaks, high in mountains that serve as the border between two states.  
 I have been too long on wide gray highways  
 Where to make right of way the hills have been drilled and blasted back.

As a boy I excitedly heard the drilling and shooting  
 Done to move mountains for a divided four-lane.  
 I would watch in awe as D 9 dozers did their dangerous work  
 On high walls and grades that made them want to tumble  
 End over end over end....

I anticipated new pavement  
 Barricaded by a Road Closed sign  
 Surely not meant for me on bicycle.  
 To me that sign would read New Blacktop,  
 Smooth for riding.

I have been too long on Still’s white highways  
 Lined, straight and hard toward death,  
 Forgotten the old mountain roads  
 Like this one, US 460.  
 Forgotten possible views of water and of rail.

Trains carry coal through tunnels and between the narrow road and river.  
 Their sound drowns the sound of white, stone washing water.  
 Rainfall is a harder downpour here in the high elevations of southern river  
 valley.  
 In flowing and falling water there is calmness: “Oh curved and slow is  
 peace ....”  
 On old US 460 near the Virginia line, I have lately rediscovered Still’s  
 “homing place.”

**Fall Storm on an Indian Summer Sunday Morning**

I HAVE TO TILT MY CHAIR BACK  
 Not too far so as to see only sky  
 But far enough to see colors falling  
 In the wind, from the wind through  
 The high canopy  
  
 Which is lifting from the falling  
 Exposing gray sky.  
 Thunder rides on the back of the wind  
 Announces like the too late morning warmth  
 The change signaled from yesterday’s low arcing sun.

I have to be out here to listen  
 To the train on the wind,  
 Wait for the coal train’s  
 Chalkboard screech.  
 It sounds as if it is riding on tracks transplanted  
 from Big Sandy riverside to our mountainside.

Why we fear change  
 Is because we fail to notice  
 Its apex  
 Loud and orange and yellow  
 And smelling of wood smoke.

I look forward to the loss of  
 Canopy – many-shaded green.  
 The sky will not forever remain gray.  
 Tomorrow with my head tilted so  
 I may imagine cold and then the snow  
 and then the new spring green concave dome.

Matthew Smith

### **Ancient Dogwood**

Never compromise or advertise your half-acre plot of paradise.  
Just make an oath to share it with someone special.  
Streets of gold crack and splinter in the empty degenerate wild.  
Faces known and unknown pass by on bicycles made of bliss.  
Most of the land was cleared before your arrival.  
All that remains is the ancient dogwood, resting peacefully above the  
earth.  
It still blooms in early spring, dies first frost, and then blooms again.  
Underneath its limbs we create a world all our own.

Every inch of pleasure peels like bark from the center of her delicate  
trunk.  
Layers upon layers of good will shed to the ground by morning.  
Weary old soldiers play chess in front of your self-created downtown  
market.  
One man smokes a Lucky Strike and tells stories about being the first man  
born in heaven.  
Eternity is one single day;  
Twenty-four hours refined by the hands of endless imagination and trust.  
Utopia exists in the mind.  
From the mind, the dogwood blooms.

Alex Benjamin Tackett

### **Puppy Dreams**

Y' know, they say puppies are like dreams.  
They're both a little pathetic and a little annoying  
cause they're always nipping at your heels.  
They can grow to be big  
with nurture and careful nudging.  
They can grow to complete fruition.  
Or they can stay stunted and cute and nagging  
for care, barking and gnawing at your ankles.  
It doesn't take much: an empty bowel, or two or four,  
too many days spent nestled inside,  
always waiting for a "better time."  
Sometimes, they die or disappear, and that's it.  
No more. All she wrote. *Sayonara*.  
Yes. A puppy is just like a dream:  
Stroke too much and you might crush it.



SEIRRA WILSON *Outer Beauty*

Angel Thornsbury

**The Rise of the Skeletons: An Ode to Halloween**

The skeletons will rise  
At midnight on a full moon  
Full of ghastly surprise.  
The children will scatter.  
Lonely wolves howl and carol.  
Dim stars will chatter.

The skeletons will rise  
And dance to the tune of wind  
As the daytime light dies.  
They will come together.  
Their bones will clash with joy,  
movements light as feathers.

The skeletons will rise  
With bones bristling with full joy  
Under the dark of skies.  
The sun will soon awake.  
The bones will slump to their graves.  
The skeletons will ache.



PAMELA SMITH      *Crocus and Copper*

Mary S. Wallen

**September Sunday**

*Little Rockcastle Creek*

The grass here is too tall, with seed  
pods at the top. The willow weeps  
no more, mounds of ivy circling  
where it once stood. In the distance  
a new widow leans over a banister.

A few lily blooms remain. Ironweed,  
dark purple that does not know  
to cease its come-uppance.



## Contributors' Notes



DAKOTA COLLINS *Regret*

**Dimitri Bien-Aime**, a native of Haiti, is a BSCTC student.

With deep affection, **Gayle Compton** tells the story of Appalachia's common people, allowing them to speak, without apology, in their own colorful language. He has earned three *Appalachian Heritage* Plattner Awards, three Kudzu Poetry Prizes, the George Scarbrough Poetry Prize, three New Southerner Literary Prizes and several Pushcart nominations. He has work recently published or forthcoming in *Main Street Rag*, *A Narrow Fellow Poetry Journal*, *Appalachian Voice*, *New Southerner*, and *The Blue Collar Review*. Gayle lives with his wife Sharon near Pikeville, Kentucky.

**Dakota Collins**, 16, is a Floyd County Early College Academy student at BSCTC.

**Jamie Curry**, 43, from Ann Arbor, MI, has two children, a daughter, 23, and a son, eight, and one grandson, four. Her work background is in medical and dental work. She is currently pursuing the Associate in Dental Hygiene degree. She has lived in Kentucky for nine years.

**Sue English** was a student in Professor Tim Smith's drawing class in Fall 2014. She says, "I've always been doing some kind of art, be it crafting, painting in oils, acrylics, china painting, painting on finger nails, and such. Now, thanks to Mr. Smith, I can draw a little, but I'm still just getting started."

**Mary Fitzpatrick** is a BSCTC student who plans to pursue a career in social work. She says of her writing, "I had the best daddy. Period."

**Brandon Goble** is an FCECA student who enjoys English and food.

**Dr. Bill Loftus** is Professor of Psychology at Big Sandy Community and Technical College. He has taught at the College since 1990, has a "Ticket to Heaven," writes stories that intend to make people cry happy tears sometimes, is getting kinda cranky with age, and still adores and loves his wife and life partner.

**Christopher Mulrooney** is the author of *symphony* (The Moon Publishing & Printing), *flotilla* (Odd Press), and *viceroi* (Kind of a Hurricane Press).

**Thomas D. Matijasic** is a native of Youngstown, Ohio. He earned a B.A. from Youngstown State University, a M.A. from Kent State University, and a Ph.D.

in History from Miami University. He has taught at Big Sandy Community and Technical College since January 1, 1983. Dr. Matijasic has received four BSCTC Great Teacher Awards, five NISOD awards for teaching excellence, and the 2006 Acorn Award. He served as President of the Kentucky Association of Teachers of History (1994) and served three terms on the Kentucky Heritage Council (1994-2006). Dr. Matijasic has published more than 20 articles and 30 book reviews, the most recent entitled, "It's Personal: Nixon, Liberia and the Development of U.S. African Policy (1957-1974)," WHITE HOUSE STUDIES (2011).

**Jesse Murrell**, 21, lives, works, and writes in Jamestown, Kentucky. He says, "I've always had a great passion for literature and music. My father raised me up right on classic rock and roll. My family is #1 in my life. Everything I do is for them; #2 is my job that I love so much. I'm an Outreach Librarian at Russell County Public Library, and it has been a blessing to serve the public in that way for over five years now."

**Jordan Pack** is a first-year student at BSCTC. An only child, he is a member of the Floyd County Early College Academy and is enrolled as a junior at Allen Central High School. He enjoys traveling, trying new foods, listening to music, playing piano, and spending time with his large and loud family. He currently lives in the small town of Eastern in Floyd County and is a children's ministry leader at McDowell First Baptist Church. An avid reader, his favorite authors are Nabokov and Bradbury. Jordan plans to major in Biology and attend the College of Osteopathic Medicine at the University of Pikeville before becoming a pediatrician.

**Phyllis Puffer** received her B.A. and M.A. from the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor and her Ph.D. from Michigan State University, all in sociology. She has traveled in over 30 countries, mostly in the Third World.

**Susan Salisbury** is a wife, mother, and grandmother who lives in Eastern Kentucky and never wants to leave the mountains. Through her work, she shares with her readers many childhood memories, often both touching and humorous. Susan is interested in all things Appalachian, utilizing her skills as an artist both to write and illustrate stories about the region.

Professor of English, **Ken Slone** received the Great Teacher Award in 1999 for teaching his students to take pride in their Appalachian heritage and to write from their hearts. His book of poetry, *At Home in the Mountains*, was published in 2001. His book, *Mountain Teacher — An Eastern Kentucky Teacher Tells His Story* was published

in 2005. After earning his graduate degree from Xavier University in Cincinnati, Ohio, Ken returned to his home county of Johnson. He is retired from Big Sandy Community & Technical College after a 36-year teaching career. He and his wife Debbie spend winter months on the beach at North Myrtle Beach, South Carolina.

**Matthew Smith** received his B.S.S. and M.A. from East Tennessee State University in Johnson City, TN. He teaches Sociology at BSCTC.

**Pamela Smith** is a social work student at Morehead State University. She lives in Prestonsburg, Kentucky, with her husband, Jimmy, and youngest son, Steven. Her hobbies are painting and sewing.

**Alex B. Tackett** of Ligon is a Floyd County Early College Academy student at KCTCS.

**Angel Thornsburg**, 17, a native of Floyd County, is a full-time student in the Floyd County Early College Academy. She writes, "My love for all things Halloween inspired this poem. I appreciate the little things in life, like good writing."

**Mary Ruth Wallen** is Associate Professor of English at BSCTC. She earned her M.A. in English from Indiana State University and M.F.A. in Fiction from Southern Illinois University — Carbondale.

**Seirra Wilson**, a recent graduate of Tolsia High School, has had artwork featured at the Huntington Museum of Art. She plans to further her career in the art field.

**Thomas J. Whitaker** is retired Professor of Art from BSCTC.

# CUT-THRU REVIEW 2015

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Author's name, address, telephone, and email should appear on the upper righthand corner of the first page.

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